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General Policy Towards Cuba - Invasion & Internal Situation

Backgrounder -- December 31, 1962

QUESTION: There has been some suggestion that our policy now is going to verge towards co-existence and the implication in that phrase seems to be that we are going to be more peaceful than before, or more friendly.

THE PRESIDENT: I think the press conference statement, plus the speech I made the other day, I think, indicates that that is not our policy. We are opposed to Communist control of Cuba, to the intimate association of the Soviet Union, and we hope for a change. American policies are directed toward that end and will be. No one can predict what is going to happen in Cuba, but I think all of the last 20 years have been filled with situations which were unpredictable. Nobody would have predicted a year ago, or two years, or perhaps three years ago, that we would have a war between the Chinese and the Indians.

There are a good many things which have happened in the last three or four years which could not have been predicted in '57 and '58. No one can predict what the exact course of events will be in Cuba, what movement will take place there. So I think that all we can set down now is a general attitude of the United States towards Castro, which I think we have indicated

our opposition to Castro, and also an indication of our willingness to support any free choice that the Cuban people may make following Castro, to hold out a hope to the people in Cuba, in and out of the government, that the United States would be sympathetic to a change within Cuba. We can't, it seems to me, under present conditions, go further than that.

QUESTION: Are we ready to provide any more help to those inside Cuba who may be anti-Castro?

THE PRESIDENT: What kind?

QUESTION: In any fashion; that is, beyond moral encouragement?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think, as I say, the United States is not planning to support an invasion of Cuba. We have made that clear. There may be other things.

QUESTION: I was thinking of non-invasion; that is, of elements within the country who might be interested in guerrilla action or other unrest that might eventually lead to Castro's overthrow. I wonder if we may now be prepared --

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think it would probably not be helpful to go into a discussion of it. As I said, I think all I can indicate today is that we oppose the regime for the reasons which have been given, and that we cannot predict with certainty what the future course of events will be in Cuba.

We have indicated that we are not planning to declare war on Cuba, or begin an invasion of Cuba, if Cuba, itself, does not engage in aggressive acts against other members of the Hemisphere.

QUESTION: Mr. President, how do you define aggressive acts?

Would that include or exclude subversion in other countries?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think we will just let it go with the language I have used.

QUESTION: Is it your hope, then, sir, that Castro may fall of his own weight or that people inside may revolt?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know. I don't think we can tell. I don't know. We can't tell what is going to happen.

QUESTION: Mr. President, is this what you are trying to do, to let the Cuban people know that if they get something going on their own, that we are all for it?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think we want to be in the position of looking as if we are encouraging a -- I think I would have to limit myself to saying that the United States is opposed to the regime, that it is not planning to invade Cuba, providing Cuba, itself, conducts its policy within the limitations which we have given. But we are also anxious that the Cuban people and those within and without the armed forces of Cuba and the government, who desire a Cuba which is not closely tied to the bloc, who may desire a Cuba which is different from the pre-Castro Cuba, that the United States is sympathetic to that.

I can't tell what is going to happen in Cuba or in the Caribbean. This is all we can do, it seems to me, at the end of this year. Nobody can predict.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you said at one point a few minutes ago that we would not support another invasion. You meant that not only would we not invade them, but we would not get involved in the backing of another invasion?

THE PRESIDENT: I think really that is an academic question, because who can invade Cuba? I mean, there is no force that can carry out a successful invasion of Cuba if the United States was not involved in it. The United States, as I said at my press conference in November, the United States is not planning to invade Cuba, and no other countries can engage in an invasion of Cuba because it would be a major military effort.

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